

JUSTICE NEWS

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

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Three Members of 2012 Presidential Campaign Staff Charged with Concealing Payments Made to State Senator

Three members of a 2012 presidential campaign committee were charged with offenses relating to the concealment of payments made to a former Iowa State Senator.

Assistant Attorney General Leslie R. Caldwell of the Justice Department's Criminal Division and Special Agent in Charge David J. LeValley of the FBI's Washington, D.C., Field Office's Criminal Division made the announcement.

"Federal campaign finance laws are intended to ensure the integrity and transparency of the federal election process," said Assistant Attorney General Caldwell. "When political operatives make under-the-table payments to buy an elected official's political support, it undermines public confidence in our entire political system."

"Violating campaign finance laws by concealing payments to an elected official undermines our electoral system and deceives the public," said Special Agent in Charge LeValley. "The FBI will aggressively investigate those who corrupt the integrity of our democratic process."

Jesse R. Benton, 37, of Louisville, Kentucky; John M. Tate, 53, of Warrenton, Virginia; and Dimitrios N. Kesari, 49, of Leesburg, Virginia, are charged by indictment with conspiracy, causing false records to obstruct a contemplated investigation, causing the submission of false campaign expenditure reports to the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and engaging in a scheme to make false statements to the FEC. Benton is additionally charged with making false statements to the FBI, and Kesari is also charged with obstruction of justice.

Kesari appeared in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Iowa today. Benton and Tate are scheduled to appear on Sept. 3, 2015.

The defendants were members of a campaign for a candidate in the 2012 presidential election. According to allegations in the indictment, former Iowa State Senator Kent Sorenson initially supported one candidate in the 2012 presidential election, but between October and December 2011, secretly negotiated with the defendants to switch his support to their candidate in exchange for money. On Dec. 28, 2011, at a political event in Des Moines, Iowa, Sorenson publicly announced his switch of support.

The payments to Sorenson were allegedly made in monthly installments of approximately \$8,000 each and ultimately amounted to over \$70,000. The indictment alleges that the defendants concealed the payments by causing them to be recorded – both in campaign accounting records and in FEC filings – as campaign-related audio-visual expenditures, and by causing them to be transmitted to a film production company and then to a second company that was controlled by Sorenson. According to the indictment, the conspirators concealed their campaign's payments to Sorenson from their candidate and also from the FEC, the FBI and the public.

The indictment further alleges that, in response to criticism of Sorenson's change of support from one candidate to the other, the conspirators arranged for Sorenson to issue public statements denying allegations that he was offered money for his endorsement and noting that the campaign committee's FEC filings would show that it made no payments to Sorenson.

On Aug. 27, 2014, Sorenson pleaded guilty to causing a campaign committee to falsely report its expenditures to the FEC and to obstruction of justice. He has not yet been sentenced.

The charges and allegations contained in an indictment are merely accusations. The defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

The case is being investigated by the FBI's Washington, D.C., Field Office, with assistance from the Omaha, Nebraska, Field Office and the Des Moines Resident Agency. The case is being prosecuted by Director Richard C. Pilger of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section's Election Crimes Branch and Trial Attorney Jonathan I. Kravis of the Public Integrity Section.

Benton et al Indictment

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